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Supervision resources for Newly Qualified Social Workers
< February 2024 >

![NQSW Supported Year logo]

Contents

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Introduction

Supervision is a key part of professional support and development for social workers and is embedded within the NQSW Supported Year. In this document you will find eleven supervision resources, which were commissioned by SSSC in 2020 to provide guidance and promote understanding of supervision for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs). These are written for and aimed at NQSWs, there is a separate resource for those supervising NQSWs.

These resources introduce the concept of formal supervision in social work practice and ask you to reflect on your expectations and experiences. You can read through these in order or use them individually.

This document does not contain links to external websites, as these can quickly become outdated, however, it will direct you to references and resources which you may find useful for further reading or research.

NQSW supervision resource 1

Defining supervision in social work

"Supervision is a forum for reflection and learning… an interactive dialogue between at least two people, one of whom is a supervisor. This dialogue shapes a process of review, reflection, critique and replenishment for professional practitioners… It is accountable to professional standards and defined competencies and to organisational policy and procedures". Davys and Beddoe (2020, p.22)

Other definitions and information on the development of supervision and learning theories are provided here. How we define supervision shapes our expectations of ourselves and others in supervision sessions and the expectations of our own development as supervisors and the support available for this. There are many other possible definitions for seeing supervision with slightly different lenses. All stress the goal of benefitting people, including families and carers.

This definition highlights accountability and the link between supervision and performance review or appraisal processes:

"Supervision is a process which aims to support, assure and develop the knowledge skills and values of the person being supervised (supervisee), team or project group. It provides accountability for both the supervisor and supervisee in exploring practice and performance. It also enhances and provides evidence for annual performance review or appraisal; it sits alongside an organisation's performance management process with particular focus on developing people in a way that is centred on achieving better outcomes for people who use services and their carers." SSSC (2016)

This definition focuses on social worker support to strengthen ethics:

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"Supervision is the systematic, reflective process which supports social workers to make ethical decisions. It also improves confidence, competence and morale, leading to a better service for those who use social work services." BASW (2011)

This definition focuses on relationships within the wider context:

"Supervision is a joint endeavour in which a practitioner, with the help of a supervisor, attends to their clients, themselves as part of their client-practitioner relationships and the wider systemic and ecological contexts, and by so doing improves the quality of their work, transforms their client relationships, continuously develops themselves, their practice and the wider profession." Hawkins and Shohet (2012)

The development of supervision in social work

In the late 19th century, volunteer social workers gathered around experienced leaders in an apprenticeship model and supervision was concerned with adherence to agency policy and the distribution of resources.

At the turn of the 20th century evaluation of the perceived worthiness of clients needing help turned to greater examination of the causes of poverty and social justice. From the 1920's onward social work supervision was strongly influenced by growing psychoanalytic thinking.

From the 1980's onward, in common with the rest of the public sector, supervision was increasingly concerned with ideas influenced by private sector concepts around performance and accountability.

Supervision has been described as "the most original and characteristic process that the field of social casework has developed." (Robinson, 1949, in Davys and Beddoe, 2020).

Reflection is part of social work DNA

Reflection is an important part of supporting social work organisations' core mission to serve communities (Baines et al, 2014, in Hawkins, et al 2020). Supervision has been shown to offer an important mediating role in supporting social workers to remain true to principles and a buffer for purely outcome-driven cultures supporting a more reflective, holistic focus on the supervisee and their practice.

Kolb's experiential learning cycle

The learning cycle underpins much of the theory of supervision and professional development in social work. It involves four stages, namely: concrete learning, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. (Kolb, 1984).

From the 1980s, building on this, various writers developed these ideas to inform social work supervision, notably Morrison (2001). Models were set out to help social workers and the wider helping professions improve supervision practice, naming the different processes and roles involved.

Familiar to many readers will be the popular Honey and Mumford (2006) learning styles set out in the overview for supervisors. There are various 40 and 80 item

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questionnaires available online which can be used with new workers. This may be helpful when the supervisor is familiar with these learning styles.

In an earlier stage of career development, we might exhibit a stronger style which may soften over time to inhabit a balance of styles. No style is more desirable, but we all need to be aware of areas where we would benefit from the relative strengths of supervisors, colleagues and mentors who may widen our perspective.

The four styles relate to preferences for the stages of the supervision cycle:

Experience – Activist style

Reflection – Reflector style

Analysis – Theorist style

Action Plans – Pragmatist style

Each learning style will have favourable and unfavourable activities as described by Grace (2001).

- **Activists** may favour new experiences and activities including role play, short term tasks and being thrown in at the deep end. They may be less likely to learn from lectures, reading, observing, analysing data, prescribed activities and frequent repetition.
- **Reflectors** may favour activities where they can observe other people first, with preparation and discussion time and audiovisual aids. They may be less likely to learn from role-playing in front of others, being 'thrown in' and having to make shortcuts due to time pressures.
- **Theorists** may favour situations where they must think through complex analyses, with a clear purpose, and tasks, accessing models and theories. They may be less likely to learn from unstructured situations and decision making without a policy context and with complex emotional overtones.
- **Pragmatists** may favour exercises where there is high relevance to their role, situations where the implementation is as important as the learning content, creating action plans and learning from coaches and mentors. They may be less likely to learn from situations with no clear goal or reward and learning from people outside their field.

Ideally, over time we adopt skills, that may come less naturally at first, as we learn from colleagues, supervisors and people, families and carers.

Time for Reflection

Write a brief paragraph reflecting on:

- Where you think you fit in the above continuum.
- Your strengths, either using this or another model.
- Whether you think your style has changed over time.

References

- BASW (2011) UK Supervision Policy.

- Davys, A., & Beddoe, L. (2021). *Best practice in professional supervision: A guide for the helping professions (2nd ed.).* London: Jessica Kingsley.

- Grace (2001) Continuing professional development: Learning styles. British dental journal. Official journal of the British Dental Association.

- Hawkins, P. & Shohet, R. (2012) *Supervision in the helping professions* (4th ed.). London: Open University Press.

- Honey, P., Mumford, A. (2006) The Learning Styles Questionnaire. 80-item version (Revised edition, July 2006), Maidenhead: Peter Honey Publications Limited.

- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

- Morrison, T. (2001). *Staff Supervision in Social Care*. Brighton: Pavilion.

- SSSC (2016) Supervision Learning Resource.

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NQSW supervision resource 2

The NQSW supported year pilots

Evidence from the 5-year NQSW longitudinal study (Grant et al, 2019) together with evaluation of the NQSW supported year pilot (Gordon et al, 2020) and early implementation periods provided insight into the experiences of NQSWs in Scotland. These identified that reflective, structured supervision and mentoring was core to the NQSW supported year. Supervision helped those involved understand the NQSW's practice and overall wellbeing.

In addition to the traditional supervision style of a 1:1 session with a line manager, informal support was found to be an important element. However, it was felt that the development of frameworks for peer supervision or mentoring approaches would be helpful.

Supervision practices

While it is acknowledged that there are areas of very strong practice across the sector, some supervisors of NQSWs involved in the pilot indicated that they could benefit from further training in supervision and in giving and receiving developmental feedback.

Grant et al (2019) observed a wide variation in supervision practice and that professional development took a backseat to caseload concerns finding:

"…a privileging of case-management over professional development in supervision with only 65% of NQSW getting monthly supervision and 76% of respondents reporting a focus on caseload management."

The report also identified the importance of informal support which:

"… continue to emerge as a critical if underutilised mechanism for supporting professional confidence, competence and development."

Several issues were highlighted in the report on the supported year pilots including giving and receiving developmental feedback. One of the significant findings was the benefits to NQSWs of available frameworks for peer supervision. This is explored in more detail in Section 11 of this document, Thinking about Peer Supervision.

Time for Reflection

- Reflect on the type of supervision you have experienced so far in your career.

- Consider which form of supervision you find most helpful for your learning and development.

References and resources

Gordon, J., Gracie, C. & Robertson, L. (2020) Evaluation of a pilot project for newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) in Scotland: executive summary. Craigforth, SSSC.

Grant, S., McCulloch, T., Daly, M. & Kettle, M. (2019) Newly qualified social workers in Scotland: A five-year longitudinal study. Interim Report 3. Dundee: SSSC.

Hawkins, P., McMahon, A., Ryde, J., Shohet, R., & Wilmot, J. (2020) Supervision in the helping professions (5th ed.). London: Open University Press.

Patterson, F. (2019) Supervising the supervisors: What support do first-line supervisors need to be more effective in their supervisory role? Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work 31(3), 46–57.

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NQSW supervision resource 3

Developing social work identity

The development of a professional identity based on social work values is important for NQSWs and closely linked to job satisfaction (CORU, 2020). Supervision can play an important part in supporting the development of values and identity.

Recognition of the need for protected time and space for focused reflection, particularly for supervisors, needs to be embedded in social services, including both experiential training for supervisors as well as further recognition of the value of team and group supervision (Hawkins et al., 2020).

Research shows that increasing specialisation of social work roles, health and social care integration and alignment of children and families social work with education departments has led to concerns from workers about professional identity. This has been particularly about post-qualifying learning. A SSSC report (2015) cited the 'predominance of shared learning can contribute to a loss of professional identity and a dilution of learning specific to the social work role'.

Maintaining your social work identity

As an NQSW you should be supported to maintain the contribution of your professional training, values and ethics even when practising in generic assessment or intervention roles in integrated multidisciplinary teams. This includes having access to professional supervision with a social work supervisor where the line manager is not a registered social worker. Other issues relevant to professional identity include the movement away from community social work delivery models. Insight 57 from the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS, 2020), offers a critique of this.

As mentioned in the first section of this document social work has been evolving for over a century and an important part of developing a professional identity is connecting with the wider state of the profession beyond individual localities and roles. This may include connections with local, national, or global social work organisations and developing awareness of their stance on supervision.

The employer's role

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) highlights the responsibilities of employers which includes a framework for supporting good practise that takes account of ethical principles and ensures 'effective induction, supervision, workload management and continuing professional development'. (IFSW, 2012)

Unison Scotland's Social Work Interest Group developed a position statement for professional supervision in social work in 2006, which states that professional supervision involves:

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- quality assurance, including accountable and evidence-based practice.
- learning and development, including developing individuals personally and professionally and ensuring that the social worker and agency maintain up to date knowledge about research, evidence and practice.
- support, including identifying resources to respond to stressful situations and constructive challenge in the interests of client, worker and agency.
- shared decision making, including ensuring peer and management review of professional decisions and mutual learning and development.

The supervision policy of the British Association of Social Workers (BASW, 2011) suggests these key needs of social workers:

- receiving regular, planned, 1:1 professional supervision from registered and appropriately experienced social workers.
- having routine opportunities for peer learning and discussion in the workplace and through professional networks.
- developing and maintaining relevant skills, knowledge and understanding to do their job through continuing professional development.

Time for Reflection

- How you would feedback to your supervisor about what does or does not help you develop?
- How might you influence the agenda to use the time in the best way possible for you?
- Write some of these ideas down so you can take them to your supervisor for further discussion.

Resource

Turbett, C. (2018) Community Social Work in Scotland, a critical history, fifty years after the Social Work Scotland) Act 1968.

References

BASW (2011) UK Supervision Policy. On BASW website.

CORU (2020) Shaping Social Workers Identity: An All-Ireland Study.

Hawkins, P., McMahon, A., Ryde, J., Shohet, R., & Wilmot, J. (2020) Supervision in the helping professions (5th ed.). London: Open University Press.

IFSW (2012) Effective and ethical working environments for social work: the responsibilities of employers of social workers. IFSW website.

IRISS (2020) Rediscovering and mainstreaming community social work in Scotland. Insight 57 IRISS website.

SSSC (2015) Report into a post-qualifying learning and development framework and career pathway for social workers in Scotland.

SSSC (2019) Post Qualifying Learning in Social Work in Scotland: a research study

UNISON Scotland (2006) 'Professional Supervision in Social Work' on Unison Scotland website.

NQSW supervision resource 4

Learning from case reviews

Following the death of Victoria Climbié, a serious case review (known as significant case reviews or learning reviews in Scotland) was conducted by Lord Laming (2009) who focused on social worker wellbeing and emotional costs of the work as well as supervision practices.

"There is concern that the tradition of deliberate, reflective social work practice is being put in danger because of an overemphasis on process and targets, resulting in a loss of confidence amongst social workers.''

The Care Inspectorate (2019) regularly consider aggregated learning from serious case reviews and recommended sufficient support for workers to be confident and competent, including:

'… robust and regular supervision that enables constructive challenge and time to reflect on practice and develop skills'.

The most comprehensive reviews occur when there have been extremely serious harms to vulnerable children or adults. In the case of social work, these have often identified a break down in procedures (including appropriate supervision), meaning opportunities for intervention to prevent serious harms were missed.

The National Child Protection Leadership Group provide strategic oversight and mechanisms for improvement regarding child protection across Scotland and have addressed reoccurring issues. These include organisational support and compliance with good quality supervision and support that addresses the scope of professional discretion and identifies training and development needs of practitioners.

Learning and looking after yourself

We introduce a reflective learning activity below. We encourage you to take care of yourself as you work through learning in relation to significant case reviews. It is essential to acknowledge the intense emotional responses we will have as social workers in the course of our work and learning.

Time for Reflection

- Explore the reports that have been published following significant case reviews or learning reviews in Scotland.
- Identify your own examples of when effective supervision has supported positive outcomes for a person you have worked with. Also consider situations where opportunities for improvement were not fully explored.
- Consider which supervision behaviours impacted these different outcomes.

References

Care Inspectorate (2019) Learning from significant case reviews – March 2015 – April 2018.

Laming, H. (2009) The Protection of Children in England HMSO.

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NQSW supervision resource 5

Professional knowledge and continuous professional learning

Supervision is an important component of shaping professional knowledge and development as an NQSW's practice develops. Professional knowledge is drawn from theories, research findings and practice experience (Hudson, 1997). These forms of knowledge include theoretical knowledge, personal knowledge, practice wisdom, procedural knowledge, and empirical knowledge.

Feedback from the pilot work for the NQSW Supported Year was that NQSWs wanted to move away from what feels like academic training and learning. Setting up and running a peer group (see section 12) with other frontline workers creates reflective and action learning. The SSSC refreshed approach to Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) is about recognising and recording when learning has taken place and logging this accordingly. Useful research by Ferguson (2021) considers how social workers learn and the benefits of workplace learning for social workers.

Collins & Daly (2011) argue that practice wisdom integrates a wide range of knowledge. This will include theories and relevant research to our thoughts and feelings in response to casework. Study participants reported that evidence was relevant information from case histories, notes, observations, and reports from other professionals but less from theoretical or research sources.

After qualifying, social workers can still benefit from support to maintain awareness of research knowledge and to become more skilled at making connections between casework activities and the human factors that inform decision making.

The MySSSC Learning App is a useful way of recording learning.

- This is a smartphone-based service available to anyone.
- The app helps you record your learning whenever and wherever it happens.
- You can get reminders to reflect on your learning activities.

Time for Reflection

- Reflect on how you record your learning from practice.
- When does learning happen for you?
- What different ways of developing your knowledge and skills can you think of?
- How could you evidence that in your learning log?
- How can you continue to access knowledge to support you to improve work with people, including families and carers, and contribute to your organisation's learning?

References

Ferguson, G (2021) 'When David Bowie created Ziggy Stardust' The lived experiences of social workers learning through work. EdD Thesis. Open University.

Hudson, JD (1997) A model of professional knowledge for social work practice, Australian Social Work, 50:3, 35-44, DOI:10.1080/03124079708414096.

Collins, E & Daly, E (2011) Decision making and social work in Scotland: the role of evidence and practice wisdom. IRISS.

NQSW supervision resource 6

Wellbeing and resilience needs of NQSWs

Key findings from BASW research (BASW,2020) advocates that social workers need:

- positive working conditions to provide good services.
- professional development time for reflective supervision.
- manageable caseloads and a consistent approach to allocation.
- support to reduce stress and improve wellbeing.

IRISS has published an Insight entitled Achieving Effective Supervision (Kettle, 2015) This identifies that good supervision happens when part of a broader learning culture with the following features:

- regular reviews of problems provide learning opportunities.
- an organisational commitment to continuing professional learning.
- space is made for professional autonomy and discretion.
- the emotional impact of social work practice is recognised.

There is increased awareness of the impact of secondary trauma from supporting traumatised people who access social work services and the impact that this has on workers.

Supervision and resilience

Approaches need to ensure that supervision covers the spectrum of worker needs whether in the 1:1 relationship or a mixture of approaches including mentoring and structured peer groups. In balance with this 'compassion satisfaction' (Alkema et al, 2008), is a complementary concept to that of compassion fatigue, which energises us in our role by seeing positive changes for people who use services.

The transition from university into practice may be empowering or challenging as NQSWs adjust to the additional workload. Managing this transition with feelings of growing capacity and competence requires building a good relationship with a supervisor and being aware of wider relationships and resources you can access before any work stress inhibits managing your role.

The people who access social work services stand to benefit from a more resilient and stable workforce. Effective supervision has a clear role in supporting worker resilience. Research has shown that child protection workers were less likely to leave their roles and community workers got significant protection from stress and burnout when given supportive supervision within an organisational culture positive about good supervision practice (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020).

Adamson et al (2014) argue that coping behaviours and work-life balance are essential parts of maintaining wellbeing in a profession where the use of self is a core resource.

Researchers identified several burnout factors in social workers including vicarious traumatisation and compassion fatigue (Alkema et al., 2008). However, the study supports the view that, despite working in adverse conditions, social workers also experience high levels of job satisfaction a phenomenon they term as 'compassion satisfaction'.

To reduce the risk of burnout we need to have self-knowledge and be willing to challenge assumptions we have around having to cope and fearing that a supervisor may judge us when we are overwhelmed. Supervisors are unlikely to judge, as they will most probably have experienced times when they were less able to cope. It is useful to be honest about difficulties, so a supervisor has a chance to respond to any support needs.

Knowing about local resources for workers including employee assistance schemes and access to de-briefing support, telephone and face to face counselling options can also be useful. Ask your supervisor about these. Ensuring your wellbeing and accessing support is a strength.

Wider resilience resources include mindfulness practice which has become more accessible in recent years and can be a useful practice to support wellbeing. Visit the National Wellbeing Hub for links to free resources.

Following several years of research, BASW has produced a good practice toolkit for wellbeing and working conditions. This helpfully separates responsibilities for:

- Social workers in direct practice.
- Social work supervisors and practice leaders.
- Teams, team leaders and managers.
- Senior managers and organisational leaders.
- Professional organisations & Trade unions.

Time for Reflection

- Think about a time in previous roles, during study or placement when you felt overwhelmed and note down what internal and external resources you accessed to help you manage.
- What else might have helped you?
- Do you have a clear wellbeing plan of what you do to support yourself both inside and outside of work?
- What are the indicators that you would need to ask for further support?
- Given that we often struggle to think clearly in times of crisis, you might want to note things down to be aware of. What would help you in a time of crisis?

Further information

- There is a National Wellbeing Hub for all frontline social services workers in health and care.

- BASW's Social Work Professional Support Service offers peer to peer support for personal or professional issues and is available to all registered social workers and social work students in Scotland.

- OpenLearn Supporting and developing resilience in social work.

- The IRISS website has a helpful set of resilience resources for social work and social care workers collected by IRISS, Social Work Scotland and SSSC with examples from practice.

References

Adamson, C., Beddoe, L., & Davys, A. (2014). Building Resilient Practitioners: Definitions and Practitioner Understandings, British Journal of Social Work, 44 (3), 522-541.

Alkema, K., Linton, J.M. & Davies, R. (2008). Self-Care, Compassion Satisfaction, Compassion Fatigue, and Burnout Among Hospice Professionals. Journal of Social Work in End-of-Life & Palliative Care, Vol. 4(2) 2008.

BASW (2020) Social Worker Wellbeing and Working Conditions: Good Practice Toolkit.

Hawkins & McMahon (2020) Supervision in the Helping Professions (Fifth Edition) London: Open University Press.

Kettle, M. (2015). Achieving effective supervision. Insight 30: IRISS.

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NQSW supervision resource 7

Making best use of supervision

It is important to negotiate the time, frequency, location, structure and content of supervision. Sometimes this was known as contracting, as social workers often had an individualised contract around supervision that met their specific needs.

This has increasingly given way to organisational policies which have important functions about minimum standards and accountability to employees and the public. However, negotiating your own agreement about what you want to focus on within this wider policy can still be tremendously useful and will likely be seen as a sign of your interest and personal responsibility about your learning and development.

What supervision involves

There are some areas you could include and personalise to your needs, whether they are covered by an overarching policy or not. You might want to make them more relevant to your learning style, your locality or if they were written for multi-professional departments, to your role as a social worker.

These headings are adapted for NQSWs from the Supervision Learning Resource (SSSC, 2016).

Arrangements for planned, frequent 1:1 supervision
There is no substitute for this, and it is key to the wellbeing of NQSWs and the people who use our services. It should be a joint responsibility and major priority for both parties despite work pressures.

Arrangements for complementary supervision
This may be with a registered social worker if your line manager does not have this role and for group supervision and peer reflection which we have included on the website.

The link between supervision and other management processes
This might include any probationary employment period, annual appraisal cycles, case allocation policies and specific team or departmental goals or performance expectations.

Link with your expectations, support and CPL as an NQSW
This may include sharing your last individual learning plan you worked with at your final placement and adapting it for your new role, to show where you have developed and what you are still working on.

The purpose and content of sessions
This might include models used and how time might be divided between the normative, formative and restorative functions discussed further below in supervision models.

The role of core learning elements and ethics specific to the NQSW role
This might include how you think about these in any model of supervision that you both agree to use eg see the section on the seven-eyed model which may help with this.

Administration issues
This might include issues such as an agenda and any cases identified for deeper analysis and reflection. This gives a supervisor time to read case notes and avoids spending most of the time in sessions describing case backgrounds. It also allows more focus on your assessment, interventions and support needs.

Using supervision effectively

Contracting or negotiation for each supervision relationship sometimes gives way to carefully developed organisational policies to which staff must adhere. However, if those do not cover negotiation around responsibilities and roles, session formats, regulatory and accountability issues, and the supervisory relationship those things still require individual attention.

Even with all those things in place supervision could still be somewhat compliance-based unless both parties invest in the relationship including taking some risks. For you, it might be taking risks in talking about things you may worry would impact on any assessment of your confidence or competence in your new identity as a qualified worker.

It is usually safer to take the risk of talking about difficult issues. Examples of this are:

- Difficult issues with colleagues, managers and the organisation
- Themes arising across multiple cases eg engagement issues
- Strong feelings eg anger or embarrassment in your work
- Self-care, stress levels, time management, workload
- Personal issues that impact work or vice versa
- Feeling awkward about a case or potential ethical dilemmas

In a scenario where you may receive feedback that leads to you feeling less confident, try to have a conversation about exactly that issue with your supervisor as they may be unaware of the impact on you.

When we are on a new learning curve early in a career, we may be more alert to criticism or we may need to help our supervisor understand our communication style, what we want more of and what we find more challenging. Conversely, it might be difficult for a supervisor to firmly challenge any concerns with new team members in case this is perceived as strong criticism.

It is best to discuss how to manage constructive criticism ahead of time and identify approaches which may work best for you.

Your supervisor may be highly experienced, and you may well find supervision very useful. It is still worth discussing your individual styles and approaches and how you might negotiate the relationship to work best for you, so you feel like you are taking an active role in your own development. Doing this consciously can help avoid solely describing casework activities and enable more reflective, meaningful, and challenging conversations.

Time for Reflection

- Read your organisational policy around supervision. You may have to search on your organisation's intranet or ask your manager for it.
- Supervision may have been discussed during induction activities when you were taking in lots of new information and now would be a good time to revisit it.

References

SSSC (2016) Supervision Learning Resource. On SSSC website.

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NQSW supervision resource 8

Online supervision

Good practice includes creating the right supportive environment for supervision that is holistic and meets the needs of NQSWs identified above. Individual contracting or negotiation of supervision is important even when there is a local policy in place, however it is delivered.

There are several practical concerns as well as professional issues related to online working. While familiar to many people in remote and rural locations in Scotland online working has become more commonplace in recent years. If most of your interactions with your supervisor take place online there are various things worth considering.

Research in Practice (2020) has explored remote supervision research evidence, including remote locations in Australia, showing that virtual supervision can lead to effective outcomes in the same way as face-to-face delivery. The resource also highlights the potential for additional conflicts being experienced by supervisees who cannot deliver services as well as they are used to and are struggling with the ongoing personal pressures of necessary public health restrictions.

This resource also has some useful ideas about improving the quality of online supervision which we have expanded in the list below.

- Strong internet connections (wired connection to broadband routers).
- Having a backup plan for failed connection (retries followed by phone call).
- Consider the use of headphones to improve audio quality and increasing confidentiality.
- Having the camera level with your face improves eye contact and sense of listening.
- Be about an arm's length from the camera, as this will offer the best quality image.
- Discussions about the environment including the use of virtual backgrounds for additional privacy.
- Making sure your face is well lit, with no strong light behind you eliminates a silhouette.
- Try to look at the webcam at least some of the time, particularly at emotive moments.
- Once your image is clear and well lit, consider turning off self-view to reduce distraction.
- Reduce non-verbal intensity if appropriate by 'screen sharing' useful materials.
- Be aware of the visible background and consider application-based backgrounds.
- Manage distractions by pausing PC notifications, silencing phones or excluding pets.
- It can be important to talk about how working online helps or hinders your communication style and how it impacts working with any strong emotions.

Time for Reflection

- Think about ways in which you conduct online meetings.
- Write down three things that you are using effectively and three things you could improve on. This might be useful for any online work as well as supervision and other professional meetings.

References

Research in Practice (2020) Supervision conversations using remote-working technology. Research in Practice PQS Developing Supervision Programme.

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NQSW supervision resource 9

Supervision models

A variety of models have commonly been discussed that help explain the interaction at play between stakeholders and pay attention to the different functions of supervision. Some key theories inform current practice in supervision that you may wish to explore or revisit.

Supervision policies often refer to a three or four-function model of supervision. Morrison (2001) identified management, professional, and developmental aspects and added the role of mediation in recognition of the role of supervisors. Morrison saw supervisors as the main link between frontline workers and management structures. These multiple dynamics of supervision are set out by Kettle (2015), who highlights that a "task-focused approach fails to take account of the interaction between these functions," or to "situate the dynamics of the supervisory process within the wider organisational or inter-agency context".

Proctor (2008) advocates a three-part supervision model that has been influential, and these terms are often discussed in wider literature including the SSSC Supervision Learning Resource (SSSC, 2016).

The key domains are:

Normative: Ensures that staff work within a safe framework for practice.   Maintains trust and professional standards.   Explores options within the supervision session.

Formative: The learning function. Sharing knowledge and skills and experiences. Problem solving and skills development. Assists with understanding the people who use services better. Explores alternative ways of working.

Restorative: Support for personal/professional development. Building morale and confidence.   Ensures staff function within a safe framework for practice. Maintaining their professional standards.

There is more information on supervision models and a suggested learning exercise below. We will explore a few more that might give breadth to your supervision journey and will inform models in further sections that you might want to adopt partially or wholly in your practice and organisation.

Heron (2001) set out a model which helps us think more about the variety of interventions that might happen in supervision. Both authoritative and facilitative interventions are needed but some of the facilitative needs may also be achieved in peer-group work (particularly cathartic and catalytic interventions).

Authoritative interventions
Prescriptive: explicitly direct the NQSW by giving advice and direction.
Informative: provide information to instruct and guide the NQSW.
Confronting: challenge the NQSWs behaviour or attitude.

Facilitative interventions

Cathartic: helping the NQSW to express/overcome thoughts or emotions that they have not previously confronted

Catalytic: help the NQSW reflect, discover ad learn for themselves. Move toward self-reflection, self-direction, and self-awareness.

Supportive - Build up the confidence of the NQSW by focusing on their competence, qualities, and achievements. (Heron, 2001)

Developmental models

There are several developmental models which are helpful when thinking about the domains of motivation, autonomy and awareness in supervision. As with all models it aids our thinking rather than having a linear or universal application. Factors including career history, such as a prior experience of the care sector, may impact our developmental journey.

The categories set out below are adapted from a model advanced by Stoltenberg and McNeill (2010).

Level 1 self-centred (Can I make it in this work?)

We may be focused on getting it right and the feeling of ongoing assessment or may be frustrated by not being able to get on with it after intense assessments and scrutiny in successive placements.

We may be feeling overwhelmed at times by greater caseloads and conflicted about doing a 'good enough job' rather than a comprehensive one.

The supervisor provides a safe and structured container with regular positive feedback.

Level 2 Client-centred (Can I help this client make it?)

The supervisor may be less structured and reduce direct advice, legislation and policy guidance.

Support is offered for occasional swings between feeling skilled and not able to cope with the role and needing to negotiate or ask for help.

As the supervisory alliance grows it is seen more as support for practice than continuous assessment by the organisation.

Level 3 Process-centred (How are we relating together?)

Supervision becomes a joint task, more co-productive and with more power balance.

Supervisees are less likely to use individual theory or prescribed forms of assessment and intervention as they become more comfortable with using their strengths and different range of styles in client work.

They become more self-supervising of casework and their overall development.

Level 4 Process-in-context centred (How do processes interpenetrate?)

As a supervisee's skills become more refined they become integrated with the worker's effective use of self.

They come knowing how they want to use the session and the supervisor's strengths.

The supervisee may be a supervisor or practice teacher themselves by this point.

Time for Reflection

- Of the Heron categories set out above note which interventions do you feel are most helpful and which you may be resistant to?
- How could the alliance with your supervisor progress to asking for a balance of these interventions including ones you may find difficult?
- Think of different situations over the last month. Did you need or desire different supports for them (e.g. direct advice, questions, encouragement)?
- What situations required which kind of support?

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NQSW supervision resource 10

The seven-eyed model

This widely used model developed over 35 years (Hawkins and McMahon, 2020) covers various modes that may be used in one-to-one supervision and supports enhanced relational practice.

These modes are combined with the core learning elements for the NQSW supported year to make an at-a-glance way of ensuring supervision is comprehensive and relevant.

It is not necessarily intended that these modes are all used in each session, but it allows supervisors to monitor that supervision is holistic. For example, in the literature mentioned above, modes two and six of focusing on the NQSW's strategies and interventions and the supervisor offering support and advice, may tend to dominate in a casework approach.

The following modes and linked NQSW characteristics will help prompt the conversations and approaches needed to help the NQSW to meet supported year practice expectations, ensuring a real focus on the person we work with and attention to the wellbeing of the NQSW.

Supervision focus and NQSW Characteristics:

1 Focus on the people using services and what and how they present.

Critical thinking, professional judgement and decision making.
Communication and engagement and relationship-based professional practice.

2 Focus on the NQSW's strategies and interventions.

Promoting wellbeing, support and protection.
Use of knowledge, research and evidence in practice.

3 Focus on the relationship between the NQSW and people using services.

Communication, engagement and relationship-based professional practice.
Working with complexity in unpredictable and ambiguous contexts.

4 Focus on the NQSW's skills and wellbeing in relation to their role.

Self-awareness and reflexivity.
Critical thinking, professional judgement and decision making.

5 Focus on the supervisory relationship.

Use of knowledge, research and evidence in practice.
Self-awareness and reflexivity.

6 Focus on the supervisor offering support from their own experience.

Working with complexity in unpredictable and ambiguous contexts.
Promoting wellbeing, support and protection.

7 Focus on the wider contexts in which the work happens.

NQSW characteristics.
Professional leadership.
Ethics, values and rights-based practice.

More about the model

This model can potentially be used as part of negotiating supervision in the context of evolving practice and policies. Using such a model could help us nudge supervision away from a case management focus that is too narrow and incorporate person-centred behaviours in line with national policy initiatives.

The seven-eyed model explicitly prompts a focus on the wider issues including embodying professional values at mode seven. This is central to the BASW Code of Ethics.

'Human rights and social justice serve as the motivation and justification for social work action. In solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty and to work with vulnerable and oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion'. BASW (2021)

The six ethical principles of the Standards in Social Work Education in Scotland are cross-referenced to this model. NQSWs will be familiar with working with those throughout their training and they continue to support the journey through the NQSW supported year and beyond. They echo much of the above and are expressed as:

- Social justice and equality
- Respecting diversity
- Human rights and dignity
- Self-determination
- Partnership, participation and co-production
- Honesty and integrity

Time for Reflection

- Think about how you ensure the views of people who use services are central in your practice. What else could you do?

References

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NQSW supervision resource 11

Thinking about peer supervision

From the development of supervision discussed in resource 1, we can see that group supervision preceded 1:1 models and it has benefits as well as potential risks. It can 'let in more light and air' (Proctor, 2008) and may reduce the risks from inadequate 1:1 supervision but it should not replace it.

NQSWs who think their supervision is inadequate should raise this in their organisation and continue to escalate this issue if unresolved, because it is core to our professional development and the safety of those who use services.

Nevertheless, whether with an expert facilitator (for specialist interventions) or among peers for reflective practice it can increase confidence, support learning cultures and help us broaden our perspective. Supervision and support for peer-based reflective learning, when well designed and facilitated, can create spaces to 'stop and think' (Davys and Beddoe, 2021).

"The session allowed me to learn more about the idea of peer supervision and showed me a new way of working with others where we can support each other without influencing others' decisions and projecting our views into their work."

NQSW involved in peer group supervision test session

Learning together

There is renewed interest in communities of practice which may be organised around specialisms or other subjects and are more learning focused. Meanwhile, action learning principles in groups can be empowering and a safe way to increase accountability in learning and implementing new roles and skills.

Generally, group work requires strong boundaries and attention to group dynamics which could destabilise an activity that requires an element of vulnerability with peers. For example, most of us at one time or another, but perhaps more often early in our careers, may struggle, perhaps without cause or evidence, to believe our work is 'good enough' or else we question our skills.

At such times it can be extremely helpful to share these within a peer group and get a sense that these are shared struggles. Structure helps to contain risks where participants may, in understandable frustration, introduce unhelpful comparisons, give unsuitable advice or spend time complaining about the organisation.

There may be inconsistent commitment if some participants are reluctant, so group work would ideally be a positive individual choice with organisational support and the joint ownership of a clear contract essential.

There is more information on using peer group reflective practice and a suggested learning exercise included here.

"Most helpful was the peer group reflective practice approach. This was a new method and I enjoyed exploring this. I would like to set this up within my workplace so this will be appearing on my next supervision agenda if not informally before." NQSW involved in peer group supervision.

Approaches to peer learning

There is a great variety of approaches to group supervision and in some areas of the helping professions, including some social care settings, peer learning might be the main way of delivering supervision. In social work 1:1 supervision is the dominant model and essential for NQSWs. However, group supervision models and specifically peer reflective practice are highly complementary without compromising organisational accountability.

Peer groups have identified some of the advantages and disadvantages of group supervision including greater insight, reduced isolation and organisational learning with problems such as competitiveness, judgements, time commitment and 'groupthink' (Hawkins and McMahon, 2020).

The authors go on to suggest group dynamics of between four to seven peers with shared values, clear contracts with simple but firm ground rules. They suggest that a time for social connection at the beginning helps to avoid going off-topic later.

Action learning sets

Having time for feedback at the end helps to identify any discomfort or breaches of ground rules. Of course, groups require regular review and need to be situated in terms of the expectations of employers, regulators and those who use services.

Action learning sets (Revans, 1998) have been used in social service settings in areas of leadership development, integration, undergraduate training and NQSW supported years in other UK nations. As a voluntary reflective learning opportunity in addition to line management supervision, it has principles that can help support broader development:

- There is no learning without action and no sober and deliberate action without learning.
- Adults learn best when they are directly involved in their own learning about a current life situation.
- Adults who voluntarily choose a learning experience usually learn more readily.
- Applying that learning in the workplace makes it more personally meaningful and of greater benefit to the organisation.

Individuals, usually voluntarily, join a group of four to eight people who meet regularly and agree on ground rules and ways of working. They bring specific topics they want to work on and listen without interruption. Respect for other individuals, the issues they face and their perspectives are key components.

Presenters take a turn to present an issue or situation openly focusing on a live exploration about the dynamics of a problem which in social work groups, Patterson (2019) has called a space for 'thinking aloud'. Where all members are trained in this approach and highly committed to the regular group meetings a peer enabler may help define problems by using open questions such as:

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- How does that make you feel?
- How do you want things to be?
- What other options are there?

Effective peer group learning

Prior training, high commitment to closed sets and risk of unequal power dynamics between members can be issues in such groups. In the basic peer group model, set out below, this is overcome by asking members to put the enabling questions to themselves. In this way they reduce fears of being scrutinised or judged instead allowing all members of the group to reflect on how the issue presented has impacted them and their cases.

As reflective practices are a core part of social work training and formation, using these skills applied to the self would be familiar to participants and not require new resources (e.g. training) other than the group space and contract.

Open groups can sometimes better accommodate crisis and business needs and allow for groups of up to 10 members where four to seven are likely to turn up to any given session. During our test sessions, some supervisors had noted a culture developing where NQSWs felt that attending groups signalled they were perhaps not 'busy enough' leading to management intervention to encourage group work.

Structured peer group reflection

Peer group reflective models including action learning principles also meet the 'restorative' needs of a demanding profession and consequently *"learning and mutual support to address the emotional demands of social work, reflection and mutual learning are preferred over managerialist models of supervision"* (Boahen et al, 2021). Their reflections on using such group models include running with or without a facilitator or enabler role.

A more flexible open group model particularly suits groups of NQSWs and was well received in testing while developing this resource. This could be used in your organisation to increase NQSW's awareness of supervision and familiarity with peer group reflection that can be adapted to suit local contexts, including online groups. See also the section on online supervision.

In this basic model, each person briefly reflects on an issue from their role and casework. In place of any questioning by an enabler, each member, in turn, speaks from their own experience about how the themes raised by the presenter affect them in their practice. It is helpful if any speaker is reflecting from the 'I' place rather than generalising and including issues with values and feelings (cathartic). The presenter then summarises any learning from going around the group (catalytic) and includes what actions they will follow up on in their own practice. The cathartic and catalytic interventions are discussed in the section on supervision models.

This may seem relatively simple, but it can take practice and discipline as social workers to stay with this mode and prevent it from turning into a wider discussion or analysis. This structure avoids NQSWs being 'put on the spot' by external questions about their case and equalises any power dynamics and shared time for NQSW practitioners.

It helps create a culture of reflection rather than advice-giving and problem-solving, which if required should be sought from a supervisor, senior practitioner, or other mentor as per organisational policies. The group needs to agree that anyone can gently remind others of the contract if such questioning begins.

The aim is to move from the mere description or 'presenting the case' to a more vulnerable self-analysis of interaction between us and those who are using services, other professionals and our organisations without judgement of the parties.

'the group session showed me a new way of working with others where we can support each other without influencing others' decisions/projecting our views into their work'.   NQSW participant in test session.

There are benefits of NQSW groups in common skills, values and adherence to codes of practice including understanding confidentiality. The challenges include changing from activist styles that may be helpful in crisis management or pragmatic styles that might be used for case conferences, to reflective styles.

Successful peer group reflective work requires trust to deepen further which can be of significant benefit. The whole group learns from each issue raised as they are applying it to themselves in the process.

Time for Reflection

Think about and then discuss in your next supervision session with your line manager:

- What would be required for you to start a peer group reflection within your organisation?
- Who would you approach?
- What would you need to consider?

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